

When communicating with someone with disability it is important to remember...

- Not to assume someone does or does not have a disability based on their physical appearance. Some disabilities are not visible
- If a disability is visible, do not assume it is the person's only disability
- Don't make assumptions regarding communication and accessibility based on the type of a person's disability – the best way to know how to meet someone's requirements is to ask the individual!

Asking about someone's impairment

- Respect the fact that the details of someone's impairment, such as how they acquired it, and the role it plays in their life is not public information and you don't have an automatic right to know, or right to an explanation for why the person does not want to share their personal information with you. A person with disability might not want to discuss their experience of disability for any number of reasons. Among them may be that you're the 20th person that day who's asked, that it's a sensitive subject, that it's not a sensitive subject but still none of your business, or that they'd rather talk about something else.

Asking about someone's impairment (continued)

- If you need to know about a person's disability because certain information is required to carry out the work that you do, explain that to the person before you start asking questions. Tell the person what information it is that you need, why you need the information and how it will be used, who will have access to this personal information, and how this personal information will be protected/stored.
- **Always check yourself – what am I asking, why am I asking, is it essential information, or am I unnecessarily prying.**
- Approaching information sharing in this way will help to build a trusting relationship. People with disability experience a lifetime of prying, boundary breaches. If you communicate respect for a person's privacy, you will be remembered as one of few strangers who didn't pry.

Being helpful

- Someone with disability taking longer to do something, or doing it differently than how you would, is not an indication that they need your help - **If you think someone might need help, ask**
- If they accept your offer, do not assume you know what they need, **follow what they ask you to do**. If they do not accept your offer, do not be offended, or insist on taking over anyway
- If you have a person with disability as a work colleague and you want to be helpful, let them know you're happy to help if they need it, **and then wait until they ask**
- **Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't know what to do**. People with disability will not expect that you'll know the perfect response in every situation and will appreciate you asking rather than clumsily taking over

How to talk with people who have a disability

- People with disability are **people** first - put the *person* first, not the disability.
- Don't identify a person solely by their disability, and if it isn't necessary to refer to their disability, don't.
- Avoid referring to people with disability as 'victims', 'suffers from', 'challenged by' or 'afflicted with'; a disability is not an affliction. People with disability do not consider themselves to be perceived as victims or suffering for their entire life.

How to talk with people who have a disability (continued)

- Avoid referring to people without disability as ‘normal’ when used as the opposite of ‘disabled’, as this implies that the person with disability is abnormal. No one wants to be labelled as abnormal; , say ‘non-disabled’, or ‘able-bodied’.
- Speak to the person, not about them to someone else who is with them and speak as you usually would, don’t change your tone, loudness or pace.

How to talk with people who have a disability (continued)

- Remember that expressions like “did you hear about ...”, “see you later” or “talk to you tomorrow” are common cultural expressions, and **not** references to specific acts of listening, looking, and speaking. Continue to use them with people who are hearing impaired, people who are sight impaired, and people who use nonverbal communication methods
- If a person has an assistance dog with them, don’t pat, feed, talk to, or in any other way give the dog attention – it is a working dog

Disability and respectful language

The language we use can have a negative impact on people with disability and can have the effect of stereotyping, dehumanising, humiliating, or discriminating against people with disability.

- Do not identify people solely by their disability, e.g., the paraplegic, the blind person, the wheelchair lady, the deaf guy, and so forth
- Always put the person first, e.g., a person with disability, a person with cerebral palsy, a person who has multiple sclerosis, a person who has a vision impairment

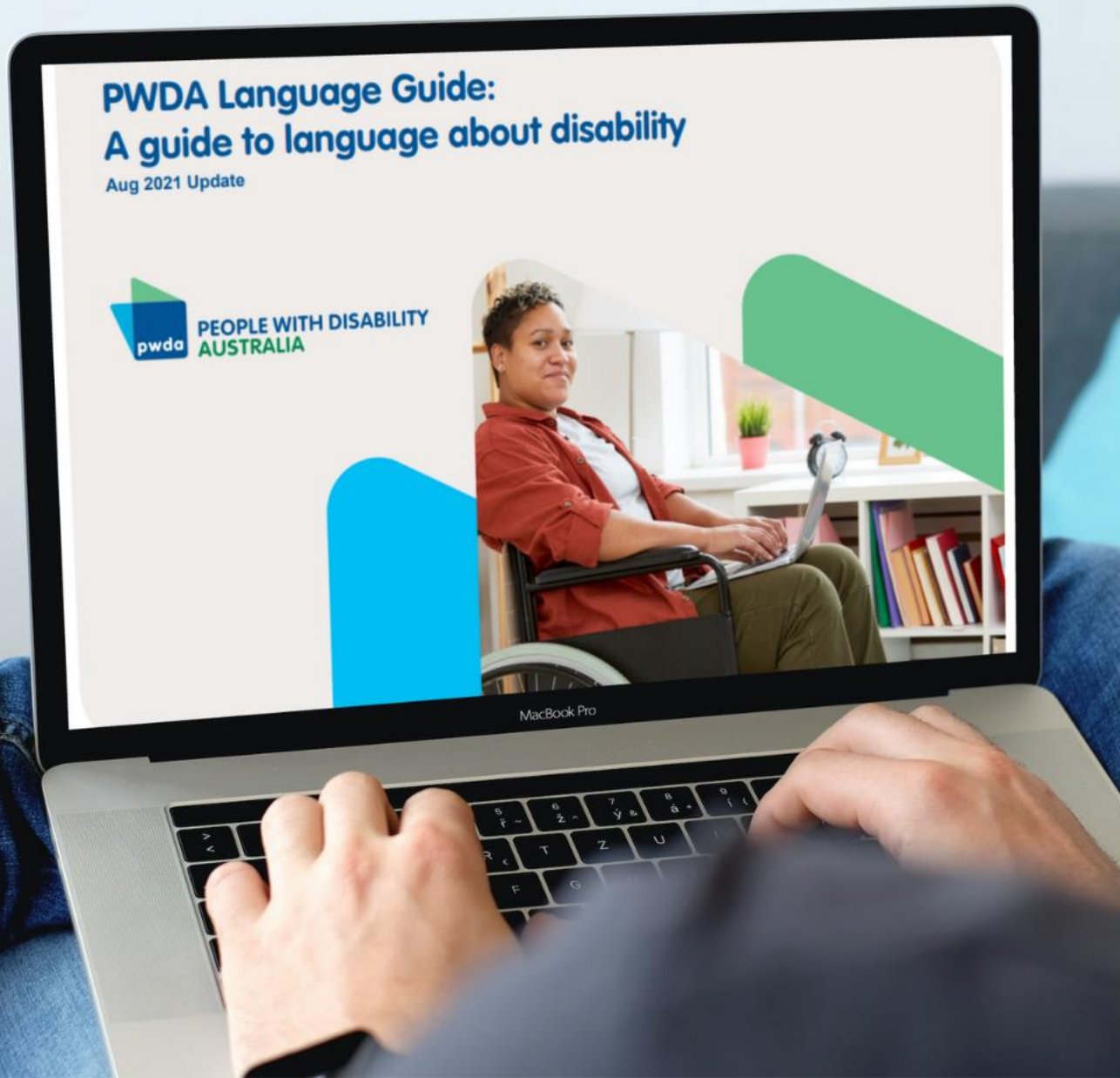
Adopting respectful and person-first language

Non-respectful Language	Respectful Language
Dwarf	Person of short stature, short statured
Cripple	Person with paraplegia/quadruplegia, * the actual impairment
Special needs child	Child with disability, disabled, * the actual impairment
Confined to a wheelchair	Mobility disability, wheelchair user, * the actual disability
Mentally challenged	Psychosocial disability, acquired brain injury, cognitive disability, Intellectual disability, * the actual disability
A diabetes victim	Diabetic, person with diabetes
Normal	Person without disability, non-disabled person
Deaf and dumb	Deaf, hard of hearing, hearing impaired
Blind person	Sight impaired, blind, vision impaired, person with low vision

Disrespectful Language	Respectful Language
Disabled person	Person with disability
Spastic	Person with cerebral palsy
Paraplegic	Person with paraplegia
An AIDS sufferer	Person who has HIV/AIDS

The most appropriate label is usually the one someone's parents have given them ...





Free Resource

PWDA's [Language Guide](#)

is available to download on the

[People with Disability AU](#) website

Disability can affect the way in which a person communicates.

Let's discuss how to approach communication with confidence.

Different types of disability can impact communication

- **Physical disability can** affect motor function, body language and speech
- **Mental illness / Psychosocial disability can** affect thought processes
- **Sensory disability can** affect perception
- **Intellectual disability** can affect comprehension and interpretation
- **Neurological disability** can affect memory, thought processes and interpretation

Communication & people with vision impairment

- A vision impairment can affect a person's perception
- Make sure you say the person's name when you start speaking to them, so they are aware you are speaking to them and always identify yourself when speaking
- Offer your arm at the elbow, if a person needs guiding
- Never pat a guide dog - it is working
- Reading things out for a person could be useful, but always first ask
- Remember, if a person has a vision impairment it does not mean that they can't hear

Accessibility Tips: people with vision impairment

- Online resources should be accessible to ensure they can be read by screen readers. Use headings and alt tags and always publish accessible PDF & Word documents.
- When presenting, describe the imagery and text in any slides and introduce yourself with a description of your appearance.
- Consider the accessibility of your physical environment and signage for a person with vision impairment.
- Refer to [Vision Australia](#) for comprehensive guidelines and advice.

Communication & people who are Deaf / hard of hearing

- Get the person's attention first – you should ensure the person can see your face to allow them to read your lips
- Avoid covering your mouth whilst speaking - smoking or eating while speaking makes lip reading difficult
- Speak as you would normally – don't slow down your speech or raise your voice - shouting does not help
- Don't exaggerate your lip movements
- Use full sentences
- Move away from noisy places and make sure lighting is good for ease of sight
- If all else fails, put it in writing

Accessibility Tips: people who are Deaf / hard of hearing

- Ensure captions are included in online meetings and videos. Live captions are more reliable than automated captions.
- Ensure transcripts and visual descriptions are available and always provide multiple.
- Organise [National Auslan Interpreters](#) for meetings and public events Visit [Deaf Australia](#) for comprehensive guidelines and advice.

Communicating & people who are non-verbal

- Be patient - don't interrupt or finish the person's sentences
- Don't pretend you understand if you don't understand
- It is okay to ask the person to repeat what they have said
- Ask closed questions to confirm your understanding (yes/no answers)
- Even if a person has difficulty speaking, it does not mean that the person has intellectual or cognitive impairment – Stephen Hawking had an IQ of 160+
- Take the time that is needed to communicate in a respectful manner



Communicating with people using wheelchairs

- Don't touch or lean on a person's wheelchair
- If a person using a wheelchair asks for help, listen carefully to what they are saying and follow their directions – they will know best what assistance, if any, they need
- Due to the height differential, noise or barriers (e.g., counters) between you and the person can hinder being able to hear you properly
- Be on the same eye level when having a conversation
- Don't assume the person who uses the wheelchair is unable to be independent or make autonomous decisions
- Just because a person uses a wheelchair does not mean they are intellectually or cognitively impaired

Communication & intellectual, cognitive or learning disability

- Communicate in short sentences, not paragraphs and break questions down to manageable sizes with one main idea
- Use plain English and, where necessary support conversation with Easy Read documents or picture cards
- Your body language is important because people with an intellectual disability often rely on visual cues
- If the conversation gets confused, or is confusing, and you need to start over - say that you are starting over
- Avoid double barrelled questions, for example; “Where are you going and what time will you be back?”
- It is important to note that many people with intellectual disability are concrete thinkers. Therefore, they may interpret verbal communications literally, be specific and direct. Avoid talking using abstracts, acronyms, metaphors or puns



About us



We are People with Disability Australia.

We are also called P.W.D.A.

We are a disability rights group.

We talk to government about things that need to change.

We speak up for all people with disability.



We work all over Australia.

We are here for **any one** with disability.



People with disability

- are our members
- can work for us
- help run our group.

Spotlight on Easy Read

- Easy Read is an approach to communication designed to support those with intellectual disability, literacy issues or who use English as a second language
- Easy Read combines plain English with imagery and layout to streamline, simplify and explain information and concepts
- Easy Read should be developed in collaboration with those for whom the resource is designed. The resource should be peer-reviewed to ensure it meets the needs of the intended audience
- Visit: [PWDA Easy Read Information](#)

Creating Accessible Information

- [Making Content Useable for People with Cognitive and Learning Disabilities](#)
- Easy Read: [Australian Government Style Manual - Easy Read](#)
- Websites: [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines \(WCAG\) 2.0](#)

**Now let's take a dive into communicating with
people who use AAC strategies and devices.**

(Augmentative & Alternative Communication)

Communication & People who are Non-verbal

There are two main types of **Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)** techniques and devices:

- 1. Unaided:** communication techniques that DO NOT require the use of an external device, such as:
 - facial expressions
 - body language
 - manual signing
- 2. Aided:** communication techniques that require the use of an external device, such as:
 - technology & specific apps; iPad, tablet, speech generating device, switch
 - non-technological; communication books, pictures, drawings/paintings, real objects

Opening the Doors: Dale's Story

(4 min, 11 sec)

Opening the door
Many paths to many destinations



Communicating with a Person who Requires AAC Strategies or Devices

1. **Reduce background noise:** choose a quiet place so you can both concentrate on the conversation
2. **Face the person you are talking to and make eye contact:** not all people will be able to look you in the eye. Those who may find this particularly difficult and young people using some sort of communication aid, book or board will have to look at what they are doing
3. **Say if it's the first time you have talked to a person who uses an alternative method of communication:** this will give the person the opportunity to show you the best way to communicate with each other
4. **Ask what helps:** ask them to show you how they use their AAC system to help you understand what, if anything, you need to do to make communication successful
5. **Establish how they communicate 'yes' and 'no':** this may not always be the obvious nod and shake of the head

Communicating with a Person who Requires AAC Strategies or Devices

- 6. When you ask a question, wait for a reply:** this sounds obvious but for some people it may take them longer to reply than you may usually wait for an answer
- 7. Be patient:** sometimes it can be tempting to finish off a person's sentence for them and some welcome this as a way of speeding up communication. However, others may find this annoying so always ask if the other person is happy for you to do this.
- 8. Always be honest about how much you have understood:** this will give the other person opportunity to explain points that have not been understood or ask for support.
- 9. If you don't have enough time, then agree to meet later:** you will need to give time to the conversation
- 10. Check back and recap:** when finishing a conversation, make sure that you both agree you have said all what you wanted to and check you have both understood everything that was communicated

[Training materials for teachers of learners with severe, profound and complex learning difficulties: level B \(complexneeds.org.uk\)](https://www.complexneeds.org.uk)

Communicating with a Person who Requires AAC Strategies

SIGN LANGUAGE: The earliest records of the use of sign language is from the 5th century BC. Signing is the 'parent' of AAC, and has revolutionised communication from Auslan to Finger Spelling, to Makaton.

FINGER SPELLING: is the representation of the letters of a writing system and sometimes numeral systems, using only the hands. These manual alphabets (also known as finger alphabets or hand alphabets) have often been used in deaf communities

Training & Education

[Training materials for teachers of learners with severe, profound and complex learning difficulties: level B \(complexneeds.org.uk\)](http://complexneeds.org.uk)



Communicating with a Person who Requires AAC Strategies

MAKATON: Makaton is a language program using signs and symbols to help people communicate. It is designed to support spoken language; signs and symbols are used with speech in spoken word order

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Communicating with a Person who Requires AAC Strategies

**Kate's
Personal Communication Dictionary**
Written by David, Jane, John
January 2008

What I do...	What it might mean...	What you should do...
Pull my jumper over my head.	I'm feeling calm and peaceful.	Leave me alone.
Wave my hands.	I'm feeling anxious.	Comfort me and try to remove cause of anxiety (it may be too noisy).
Reach out with both hands.	I'd like to go for a walk.	Take me out for a walk to the park. Take me out into the garden.

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Communicating with a Person who Requires AAC Strategies

AUDITORY: Synthetic speech. There is a wide range of synthetic 'voices' to choose from to record speech and messages on a communication device. In the same way that most adults respond better to some voices on their satellite navigation system than to others, people with communication difficulties usually have strong preferences when choosing the voice that will speak for them.

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Communicating with a Person who Requires AAC Strategies

EYE POINTING: Eye tracking systems or gaze interaction. Suitable for people with very limited movement. When a user sits in front of the computer screen, a specialised video camera mounted below the screen observes one of the user's eyes. Image processing software in the computer continually analyses the video image of the eye and determines where the user is looking on the screen. Nothing is attached to the user's head or body. A user can operate a computer program by looking at rectangular keys that are displayed on the control screen. To 'press' an eye-gaze key, the user looks at the key for a specified period of time. The gaze duration required to visually activate a key, typically a fraction of a second, is adjustable. An array of menu keys and exit keys allow the user to navigate programs independently.

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Becky's Journey - Eye Pointing

2 min 20 sec



“I wasn't exceptional in anything other than my good luck. I was selected for an experiment. Rosemary Crossley wanted a subject for her Bachelor of Education literacy project. She chose me. The aim of the experiment was to see if I could make gains pointing to different coloured blocks. Rosemary found I could point to colours, then to words, and then to letters.

She taught me to spell and to make my wishes known. I tried to show the world that when people without speech were given the opportunity to participate in education, we could succeed. I went to Deakin University and got myself a degree.

I gave papers and wrote articles on the right to communicate. I set up a website to show that there was hope for people without speech. However, people didn't understand why there weren't more like me, **they continued to act as if speech was the same thing as intelligence, and to pretend that you can tell a person's capacity by whether or not they can speak.”**

Anne McDonald

Training & Education



"For people without speech, talking is often dependent on the generosity of others, either in providing interpretation or facilitation or in giving up time to 'listen'. While this is inevitable, there needs to be an irreducible right to make one's opinions known on issues concerning your future wellbeing.

At the moment social conversation and medical consent are equal in the sight of the law, both depending on the accidental availability of communication partners with the necessary skills and commitment.

There is no right to be heard. There is no right to an interpreter. There is no obligation to listen.

While social interactions are always dependent on the politeness and tolerance of individuals, it should be possible to legislate for a right to communicate in formal situations such as courts, hospitals and schools.

Without such legally enforceable rights, people without speech will be at the mercy of decision-makers who can arbitrarily decide to disallow communication."

Please listen to me now!

If you let people without speech, be helped, they will say more than I.

**They will tell you that the humanity we share is not dependent on
speech.**

They will tell you that the power of literacy lies within us all.

**We neglect people without speech. We leave them without a means
of communication.**

As Stephen Jay Gould wrote: “We pass through this world but once. Few tragedies can be more extensive than the stunting of a life, few injustices deeper than the denial of an opportunity to strive or even to hope, by a limit imposed from without, but falsely identified as lying within.”

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Anne McDonald

